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FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
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INFO ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY

S E C R E T NIAMEY 001160

DEPT FOR DS, INR, DS/IP/AF, AND AF/W
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/15/2018
TAGS: ASEC CASC PGOV PREL NG
SUBJECT: NIAMEY EAC - UNEXPLAINED DISAPPEARANCE OF UN
SPECIAL ENVOY

Classified By: RSO Jeffrey A. McGallicher for reasons Section 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (S) The EAC discussed the unexplained disappearance of UN Special Envoy Robert Fowler, Special Assistant Louis Guay, and their unidentified local driver. Fowler and Guay are both Canadian nationals. The EAC met twice on December 15 to discuss this; first, as an initial report, and second, to report back from information gleaned from contacts. The following is what Mission Niamey knows about the unexplained disappearance:

¶A. This is the third trip to Niger this year for Special Envoy Ambassador Robert Fowler, who was invited by the Ministry of National Defense.

¶B. Ambassador Fowler arrived in Niger on Thursday, December 11, 2008.

¶C. The first two trips to Niger were approved by the GON, highly publicized, and the GON provided appropriate security.

¶D. The most recent trip was approved by the GON, was to be discreet, but not secret, and was to last 10 - 12 days. FAO coordinated the trip. Ambassador Fowler was to meet with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Defense and members of civil society. He was also scheduled to attend events related to the 50th Anniversary of the Republic of Niger on December 18.

¶E. On December 14, Ambassador Fowler reportedly asked the UN for a vehicle and driver to take both Louis Guay and him to the gold mine located near Tera. Tera is located on the bottle-neck western tip of Niger, south of, or the other side of the Niger River, near the Niger/Burkina Faso/Mali borders:
Note: One must take a ferry to cross the river.

¶F. Ambassador Fowler considered this trip to be personal business and did not coordinate the trip with the GON, the UN, or the Canadian Embassy.

¶G. Neither the UN nor the GON knew of, or apparently approved the trip.

¶H. Ambassador Fowler reportedly arrived safely at the gold mine. The group reportedly departed the gold mine at 1600 hours local on December 14, presumably to drive back to Niamey. They arrived at the ferry crossing around 1640 hours.

¶I. At 1640 hours, Guy Villeneuve, the Canadian Chief of Mission, was in cell phone contact with Special Assistant Louis Guay, a personal friend of Guy. Guy stated the two had coordinated dinner plans for December 14 at 1930 hours. Guy assumed that since Louis was at the ferry crossing, he would easily be in Niamey by 1930 hours.

¶J. Guy became concerned when Louis failed to arrive for dinner as planned, and contacted Louis's hotel at 2240 hours, learning that Louis had not yet arrived at the hotel.

¶K. Sometime later, Guy contacted the UN and the UN made appropriate GON notifications.

¶L. About 0200 hours on December 15, the local police located the UN vehicle. The police apparently were only aware that a UN vehicle was missing, and were not aware that the people inside the vehicle were also missing. The police, believing their mission complete, took possession of the vehicle and drove it to their police station. (Note: The vehicle bore UN license plates, but it did not have any prominent UN markings on the side of the vehicle. End note.)

¶M. Reports indicated that at 0500 hours, when the police learned that the occupants were also missing, they, along with the Gendarmes, drove the vehicle back to the place where they had originally located it, and parked it as they had found it. Reportedly, the vehicle was found parked on the right-hand side of the road, with its motor running, its right turn-signal engaged, and three cell phones, along with a camera, inside. Additionally, all reports indicate that nothing was apparently stolen or missing from the inside of the vehicle. Reports indicate the cell phones belonged to Ambassador Fowler, Louis Guay and the driver.

¶N. The GON is investigating and the UN is conducting a background investigation on the driver. The GON and UN will provide updates as additional information becomes available.

¶2. (SBU) Post will continue to monitor the situation and provide appropriate updates as they become available, and will adjust its security posture as needed.

ALLEN